

**Prepared Remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft  
International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference  
Monday, November 15, 2004**

Thank you, Chief [Joe] Polisar and Dan Rosenblatt, for the invitation to join you here in Los Angeles. And thank you, Chief [William] Bratton and Sheriff Baca, for hosting the conference in the City of Angels.

I have been privileged to meet with you at your national conference three of the last four years. The year I missed was due to the tragic terrorist attacks on America in 2001. The attacks on September 11th, of course, changed everything for law enforcement.

Three years ago, I announced the re-organization of the Justice Department to combat the terrorist threat. It was clear our nation's safety and security could not be achieved without the coordination and cooperation of federal, state and local law enforcement.

Protecting the lives and the liberties of our citizens from terrorism has been the focus of law enforcement on every level. We have asked the men and women of law enforcement to undertake their challenging responsibilities on the streets of our communities, while also making a commitment to defend our nation from terrorists.

That commitment to safer streets and a more secure nation has been evident day after day, year after year. Your focused leadership and the dedication of the men and women of law enforcement have resulted in a record of public safety that is historic, and a level of security that is awe-inspiring.

I am here today to thank you for your leadership, and to thank the men and women who are our feet on the street, and who proudly wear the badge of justice.

Four years ago, if I had been told that the Department of Justice and law enforcement was expected to drive down the rate of violent crime to historically low levels, I would have been confident in taking on that task.

If I had been told, "Illegal drugs are a problem, too. You must take down the drug lords, while also reducing drug use to record lows among young people," I would have said, "Sure."

And if I had been told, "After all of these corporate fraud scandals, there is little confidence in the world's most influential and important financial market, so clean up that mess and restore integrity to the financial markets," that is a challenge I would have accepted.

But then, if I were told, "Do all of that, and, by the way, we do not know when, or how it is going to happen, but a terrible, global threat is going to inflict unimaginable violence on America, so deal with that, too, and also make sure it does not happen again." At that point, I am not sure what I would have thought.

Yet in the past four years, that is what we have achieved. Against the odds, law enforcement has united to achieve a safer and more secure environment for our citizens.

Over the past three years, the Justice Department and the FBI, working with the intelligence community and foreign, state and local law enforcement, have succeeded in the critical mission and top priority of preventing another major terrorist attack on American soil. Together, we:

- Dismantled terrorist cells all across America, from New York to Oregon, from Florida to Ohio, from Virginia to California.
- In fact in Buffalo, Portland, and Columbus, our terrorism cases would have been far more difficult to make were it not for the diligence and focus of local law enforcement.
- In San Diego, federal law enforcement worked with local law enforcement and the Hong Kong Police Department to shut down a drugs-for-weapons plot that also might have armed al Qaeda operatives.
- Overall, we have brought criminal charges against 372 individuals.
- Convicted 194 individuals.

Throughout the summer and into the fall, our nation has been on heightened alert. I know this has put additional pressure on your manpower. But our efforts allowed our national life to continue. Families traveled, business thrived, and democracy flourished, thanks to your efforts.

Some people doubted that law enforcement could both wage a war against terrorism and battle violent crime. But that is exactly what we have done.

Last month, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that the rate of violent crime is at an historic, 30-year low. But this historic low does not indicate how successful our crime-prevention efforts have been.

Over the past three years, we have seen double-digit reductions in the rate of:

- Rape and sexual assault: a 31 percent reduction.
- Robbery: a 31 percent reduction.
- Assault: a 26 percent reduction.

These are real people we have helped. Specifically, between 2001 and 2003:

- 1.4 million fewer friends and neighbors were assaulted.
- 229,000 fewer citizens were robbed; and.
- 93,000 fewer mothers, daughters and girlfriends were raped.

To make our streets safer, and our communities more secure, we are also working together to take the dangerous instruments of violence off the streets.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police has been a staunch ally in President Bush's Project Safe Neighborhood Initiative. This program has:

- Helped law enforcement across the country increase federal gun-crime prosecutions by 76% over the past four years.
- In FY 2004, almost 13,000 offenders were charged.

- More than 10,000 individuals were convicted - the largest number ever in the federal system in a single year, and a 12 percent increase from the record setting level of FY 2003.

Despite these successes, some people still do not get it. Last week saw the headline in the New York Times: “Despite Drop in Crime, An Increase in Inmates.”

Well, duh. Prison cells fill up when you catch the bad guys, and that is exactly what we have been doing. By taking the gun-toting thugs out of the communities we are seeing real results.

Over the past four years, the number of gun crimes has decreased by more than 250,000. This is an 18 percent reduction in the incidence of gun crime compared to the three years prior to Project Safe Neighborhoods.

In the area of illegal drugs, instead of just focusing on low-level dealers, we attacked the major suppliers, targeting the 58 most ruthless and aggressive drug purveyors in the world. Thirteen of these organizations, which are on what is called the Consolidated Priority Organization Target list, have links to terrorist organizations.

Just as we have with terrorism and violent crime, we have worked together to attack the scourge of illegal drugs. In fact, 83 percent of our ongoing CPOT cases - about 2,000 investigations - involve state and local law enforcement. Our coordination and cooperation is paying big dividends.

In the past two years, we have dismantled 14 of those hardcore drug operations - almost 25 percent of the total. We also disrupted severely 8 organizations. In addition, the heads of 17 CPOT organizations - nearly 30 percent of the total CPOT targets - have been arrested.

Overall, almost 40 percent of our CPOT list has been destroyed or is a far lesser threat to the lives of our citizens. Over the past two years we have seen:

- Cocaine production decline 30 percent.
- The number of new users of Ecstasy and LSD drop dramatically in the past year - the steepest decrease in the past 50 years.
- Illegal drug use by 12- and 13-year-olds drop a stunning 29 percent for the gateway drug marijuana.
- Record reductions in drug use, including an 11 percent drop in drug use among 8th, 10th and 12th graders.
- This is the first drop across all three grades in a decade.

Finally, in 2001, our economy was rocked by massive corporate scandals that had festered in the preceding decade. President Bush created the Corporate Fraud Task Force, and in 28 months:

- More than 900 violators have been charged in more than 400 cases.
- More than 500 individuals have been convicted, including top executives at Enron, Worldcom, ImClone, and Adelphia.

Where once there were doubts about the American marketplace - the largest and most important financial market in the world - today, we have a marketplace of integrity.

Together, we are taking down the lawless, the violent, and the gun-toting thugs. We are sentencing them to tough time. We are sending a clear message to those who might consider similar acts of violence. We will catch you. We will punish you. We will see justice done.

Through our cooperative and coordinated crime-fighting, we are achieving historic levels of safety and security for our citizens. Our cooperation has built a stronger and superior law enforcement community and has led to the enlistment of a vigilant citizenry.

With the help of the IACP and your departments, we are reaching milestones in the President's call for citizens to become involved in securing their communities. The Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) Program has more than doubled since last year, increasing participation from 27,000 to 69,000 civilians.

This is remarkable growth when you consider that just two years ago, there were 76 programs in 27 states. Today there are 1000 programs, with volunteers in every state. These programs give our citizens an opportunity to contribute to a cause that is greater than themselves, while also allowing law enforcement officers to do their jobs where they are most needed - on the streets and in the communities.

I want to share one final piece of good news with you today, which I just received this week. In June 2004, the Justice Department launched the Violent Crime Impact Teams (VCIT) initiative. These joint federal, state and local task forces operate in 15 cities - from Baltimore to Las Vegas, Miami to Los Angeles. Violent Crime Impact Teams target and take down the cities' most violent criminals, in order to decrease the number of homicides and the number of firearms related to homicides.

To date, almost six months into the program, we are seeing results. Overall, VCI teams have arrested more than 2,500 individuals and seized more than 2,500 firearms.

The VCIT initiative, like many of our other cooperative efforts, is making our communities safer and expanding the freedom of our citizens. Together, we are proving to our citizens that they do not have to move in order to live in a safe community.

I thank you for your support of our efforts. Cooperation and coordination are changing for the better our federal, state and local crime-fighting capacity. There have been challenges, but our efforts in the past four years confirm what can be achieved when we work together.

More than a century ago, in another time of trial for our nation, President Abraham Lincoln called his government to arms. "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present," he said. "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so must we think anew and act anew."

Lincoln's words were worthy of repetition three years ago, and they are worthy now. To meet the challenges of today, we must continually think and act anew, whether in the areas of counter-terrorism, combating violent crime or drugs. That is what we have done, and that is what we are doing.

Whether it is improving information sharing through efforts such as anti-terrorism advisory councils or the national criminal intelligence-sharing plan, we are working together to keep our nation more secure from those who would destroy us and our way of life. Whether it is coordinating anti-crime efforts through Project Safe Neighborhoods or Violent Crime Impact Teams, we are working together to keep our communities safe.

Each of us is charged with providing the security that preserves and protects the lives and liberty of the American people. We are charged with ensuring that America remains a beacon of freedom and opportunity for all the world to see.

Each of you - along with the men and women under your command - is keeping that charge. Together over the past four years, we have helped to make history. It is well understood that this is my last opportunity to address you as Attorney General of the United States. Thank you for your cooperation and please thank your officers and deputies - the ones with their feet on the street. It is the business of justice to enforce freedom.

May God bless you, and may God bless America.